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But we do have to insist that the kind of tyranny that has gone on in Iraq for so many decades must in fact stop, either by Saddam Hussein living up to his obligations under the U.N. resolutions or his being driven from power and an Arab leader who will respect the rule of law and who will provide the kind of fairness for his own people can be found.

Mr. MEEHAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight with a heavy heart but with determined resolve. A member of Congress faces no more important debate than authorizing the President to use military force.

Just over a year ago, Mr. Speaker, the eyes of the world were opened to the depths to which evil men will descend in order to put fear in the hearts and minds of peace loving people.

In the post-September 11th world, Americans now understand that there are those who have no regard for human life, and that they will kill the innocent in untold numbers to achieve evil goals.

We now also know that sometimes our Nation must act to prevent that which may happen in the future.

Which brings us to Saddam Hussein and Iraq's pursuit of weapons of mass destruction.

Saddam has a unique brand of state-sponsored terror that threatens the world like no other.

Unchecked, he pursues chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons and has demonstrated the capacity to use them.

Among dictators and despots, his record stands by itself: he has brutally murdered and repressed his own people, he has used chemical weapons against his neighbors and his countrymen including women and children, he has launched unprovoked attacks on other nations, he sponsored an assassination attempt on former President Bush, he harbors terrorists including members of Al Qaeda, and he defies the will of the United Nations and the international community by refusing to disarm and continuing to develop every conceivable weapons of mass destruction known to man.

That is why it is critical that the United States asserts its unique leadership role in the international community and put an end to Saddam's pursuit of weapons of mass destruction.

Now is the time to work within the United Nations Security Council to move a tough Resolution calling for the complete disarmament of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction under threat of force by a global coalition.

It must be the policy of the United States to exhaust all forms of diplomacy within the United Nations and other appropriate forums before considering any other course of action relative to disarming Iraq.

And if that diplomacy fails, then we must act with the broadest coalition of nations as possible to force the disarmament of Saddam's weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Speaker, the strategy that Secretary Powell briefed me on that we are pursuing with the U.N. Security Council is precisely the reason why I am such a strong supporter of the Alternative being offered by John Spratt of South Carolina.

The Spratt Alternative authorizes the use of U.S. military force in pursuit of a Security Council-sanctioned effort to disarm Iraq, by force if necessary.

That is what Secretary Powell and the Administration are pushing for within the U.N. right now and that is what the Congress should be supporting.

This alternatives makes clear that if the Security Council fails to take action that Congress will act immediately to vote on authorizing the President to use unilateral, if necessary, force against Iraq to disarm.

We are also considering the underlying resolution that provides the President with the authority to use force in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolutions and unilaterally.

It is a significantly broader authorization than the Spratt Alternative. However, changes have been made including: (1) support for and prioritization of U.S. diplomatic efforts at the U.N.; (2) limiting the scope of the authorization to Iraq only; (3) requiring presidential determinations to Congress before the president may use force; (4) and requiring the President to consult with and report to Congress throughout this process.

I had hoped that there would have been more opportunity for the House to improve on the underlying resolution during the course of this historic debate.

However, I was deeply encouraged by the President's words Monday night when he said, "Approving this resolution does not mean that military action is imminent or unavoidable."

Likewise, I was deeply encouraged by my meeting yesterday with Secretary Powell in which he spelled out in detail our strategy for action within the U.N. Security Council.

I take both President Bush and Secretary Powell at their word. In the coming days, weeks and months, I plan on holding them to their words.

As a Ranking Member of the House Armed Services Committee, I've seen the bravery of our men and women in uniform.

In fact, I was able to visit many earlier this year in Afghanistan and I was struck by their determination to secure the peace for that nation thousands of miles from home.

It pains me that more families may be missing their loved ones soon.

Nevertheless, let there be no doubt that Saddam Hussein's unfettered pursuit of weapons of mass destruction are a real and growing threat to the United States and the international community, and that whatever course others may take—America will defend herself.

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak against this resolution. We all recognize that Saddam Hussein is a tyrant and that he is a dangerous enemy. The question is whether this resolution is the right way to address the threats presented by his regime.

The Administration says that Iraq presents an imminent threat to the United States, that unless we give the President carte blanche to launch a unilateral, preemptive attack, we will be subject to attack by weapons of mass destruction. No one needs to convince us of the horror of weapons of mass destruction or the evil intentions of Saddam Hussein. But does that justify the blank check this resolution gives the President? We have listened to the testimony, read the briefs, and weighed the arguments presented by the Administration. In my view, they have yet to prove their case. They have presented no credible evidence that the United States faces imminent attack. They have presented no credible evidence that Iraq was involved in the September 11th

terrorist attacks or that it is giving material aid to those involved in those attacks.

Are we setting the bar too high? I don't think so. The evidence of imminent threat should be credible, conclusive and irrefutable if we are talking about the United States unleashing the dogs of war. Striking the first blow is unprecedented in American history. It has always been a point of honor that the United States does not start wars. If we are going to depart from a fundamental principle that has guided U.S. foreign policy for more than 200 years, the evidence of necessity must be iron clad.

This is much more than a point of pride. It is not an abstract argument. Through this action, the world's only remaining superpower is asserting a principle that the nations of the world—including the United States—have struggled to consign to the past. We have rejected the old idea that any nation which claims to feel threatened or aggrieved can unilaterally and preemptively attack another without the sanction of the international community. The power to initiate war is no longer untrammelled and absolute. Think for a moment of the precedent we are setting, of the Pandora's box we are opening. What if, tomorrow, India or Pakistan says the other constitutes an unacceptable threat? Would this justify one of these nuclear-armed countries attacking the other? What about China and Taiwan? What about any number of other countries whose relations with a neighbor are beset with tension, suspicion, threats, and insecurity?

More immediately, what about our relations with our allies, the nations on which we depend to help us keep the peace and bear the burden of protecting our interests? We should be careful not to initiate a new age of American unilateralism that leaves us without allies. The Administration thinks they are dispensable in the case of Iraq. Maybe they are. But if our alliances fray and disintegrate, it is certain that there will come a time when we do need them. Will they be there for us? Maybe, maybe not. But one thing we can be sure of: it is foolhardy in the extreme to ignore our allies' importance to the system of international relations and the maintenance of America's prosperity and national security interests.

I have every confidence that our troops will display the bravery and professionalism we have come to expect from them. But the consequences of a U.S. victory are liable to be a huge burden for the United States. We will have taken on the responsibility for peace and order, for feeding and sustaining an entire population, and guaranteeing the territorial integrity of Iraq. All this in the context of a population which may or may not be receptive to the presence of our armed forces. We will have to counter the centrifugal dynamics that drive the Kurds in the north and the Shiites in the south away from the Iraqi state. We will be responsible for defending Iraq's long border with Iran against incursions. We are talking about committing tens of thousands of troops, perhaps hundreds of billions of dollars, for many years, maybe decades.

And what will be the impact of an invasion in the rest of the Muslim world? The reaction will not be an outpouring of support for the United States. It will feed the flames of fanaticism. It could well destabilize Egypt, Jordan and other friendly nations. Are we prepared to commit more troops, more money, more prestige to shoring up these governments?